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ABSTRACT

As machines have become a more common part of daily life through the passage of time, the idea that the line separating man and machine is slowly fading has become more popular as well. This paper examines three critics of change through their most famous works. One of the most popular views of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" is that it is a criticism of science's impact on people. The book's popularity was due in part to the fact that it reinforced fears of industrialization replacing man. The idea that man and science, or man and machines, would be the next step in evolution is still an intriguing concept. Marshall McLuhan's prediction in "The Media Is the Massage" that technology must improve or replace vision to allow for man to continue to grow was met with criticism from all areas of English and communications. These individuals felt as though McLuhan was attempting to replace the soul of communication with technology. Samuel Florman's "The Existential Pleasures of Engineering" deals with the relationship between man and machine, speaking of what has happened as opposed to speculation on what could happen. It is an indication of how the morals of the engineer are formed, apparently from the things they build, instead of from the society they build for. (AEF)

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As machines have become a more common part of daily life through the passage of time, the idea that the line separating man and machine is slowly fading has become more popular as well. I would like to discuss three critics of this change through their most famous works.

Mary Shelley's impact on this school of thought is obvious to this day. Although her most famous work, Frankenstein, has been interpreted in numerous ways, analyzed as statement about everything from sexual tension to a woman's role in society, one of the most popular views on the book is as a criticism of science's impact on people. The plot of the book revolves around a man of science and how his dreams of bettering man through technology go terribly wrong. This in itself could be interpreted as a statement about uncontrolled progress, but when the characters in the book are looked into more deeply a deeper criticism becomes evident. She describes Dr. Frankenstein as a man devoid of spiritual foundation, lacking in any belief in the world outside the tangible. Dr. Frankenstein describes his beliefs during his narrative in chapter 4, "...my father had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors . . . " and later saying,"Darkness had no effect upon my fancy; and a church yard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life...." The void left by his lack of spiritualism is filled with the drive for scientific inquiry, and thus it is the science that has become such a big part of his psyche that eventually leads him into peril.

In Frankenstein Shelley laid the groundwork for the concerns of many in the future, and created one of the most common themes in science fiction today. As Terrence Holt wrote in "Frankenstein as Science Fiction" describing the most bitter irony of the novel "The inventor's hope of accelerating evolution and the ironic devolution of both creature and creator not only reflect the central strain of nineteenth century biological theory, but also introduce two enduring themes of modern science fiction, evolution and its discontents." What she did is create a work that many people clung to at that time, for the middle class that was currently undergoing industrialization was looking for a work like Shelley's to show them that their fears were justified, "In short, Frankenstein sings the litany of a middle class undergoing industrialization,...". Shelley accomplished a remarkable feat with this work, making it accessible for the masses during her time period while being truly ahead of her time. The idea that man and science, or man and machines combination would be the next step in evolution, that pervades the book, is still a very intriguing concept, and she laid an excellent groundwork for thought to this day.

Another work that came much later, but in many ways bears a strong resemblance in message, if not theme to "Frankenstein" is Marshall McLuhan's *The Media is the Massage*. Although Shelley was likely more concerned with technology and industrialization as a whole, and McLuhan is more concerned with media, both make a strong statement about technology's encroachment around and into man's body and psyche.

In this book McLuhan states: "the wheel is an extension of the foot...the book is an extension of the eye...electric circuitry an extension of the central nervous system", he attempts to roll all of the things that are common in a persons life into that person's being, to him there seems to be little use for distinctions between man's physical makeup and man's complete make up at all. This is an interesting and relatively radical idea, but it was his predictions made from this that really drew attention to the work. McLuhan explains "Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act- the way we perceive the world." An example would be crediting the invention of type for the growth of linear thinking, which in turn would mean if writing had evolved another way (like hieroglyphics for example) a different thought process most likely would have developed.

It is from here that he makes the prediction about man's future that drew the most negative reaction. When he wrote: "At the high speeds of electric communication a purely visual means of apprehending the world are no longer possible; they are just too slow to be relevant or effective", in other words, technology must improve or replace vision in order for man to continue growth. Many interpreted this as meaning that books and literature as known today and as they have been known in the past are no longer necessary and will fade into obsolescence. This statement acquired him scores of critics from all areas of English and communications. These individuals felt as though McLuhan was attempting to replace the soul of

communication with technology in much the same way that science replaced the soul of Dr. Frankenstein in Shelley's work.

Samuel Florman's *The Existential Pleasures of Engineering* is related to these first two works, as he is concerned with the relationship between man and machine. He differs from my first two subjects significantly, as they spoke in speculation, Florman speaks about what has happened. It is easy to see how engineers as whole, being closest to technology would be the most effected by it, and thus *The Existential Pleasures of Engineering* finds its niche. Throughout the book Florman makes no real distinction between Engineers and their work, and even make efforts to blur the line between the two.

Instead of speaking about what could happen if man and machine become too close, he speaks about what has happened due to this combination. A nostalgic tone pervades the beginning of the book, speaking about the glory days when the creations of the engineer brought him acclimation and pride, in contrast to the blame and mistrust of today. It is interesting to see how he admonishes those who criticize the engineers, at one point trying absolve the engineer of responsibility from the results of their work, yet later on trying to strengthen the connection. An example is his refute of criticism from antitechnologists, where Florman disregards their attitude because they speak of technology "as if it had and existence of its own."

I regard The Existential Pleasures of Engineering as a book for the new man shaped and built with machines, a book that begins with the premise that the engineer and his work are one, and then goes from there. Deliberately or not, it gives a remarkable account of how the things predicted in the past have come true. An excellent example is the relationship between technology and the morals of the engineer. Florman says: "I submit that study of the liberal arts will rob him of his innocence, stain his character, make him less 'moral'- or at least less naive." If this is true, it is an incredible indication of how the morals of the engineer are formed, apparently from the things that they build, instead of from the society they build for.

As the first generation raised with computers from birth reaches maturity I think that the precedents set in the past will prove very influential in the future. Whether or not man will lead machine or machine will lead man has yet to be decided. It will be very interesting to see to what extent the predictions and ideas given by these three authors develop in the future.

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